AN ANSWER TO ALL THE EXCUSES AND PRETENCES Which Men ordinarily make for their not coming to the HOLY COMMUNION.

Fitted for the Meanest Capacities, And very proper to be given away by such as are Charitably inclined. Price 3 pence.

By a Divine of the Church of England.

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AN ANSWER TO

All the *Excuses* and *Pretences* which Men ordinarily make for their not coming to the Holy COMMUNION.

Luk. 14. 16. &c. A *Certain man made a great Supper and had many; And sent his Servant at Supper time, to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began* TO MAKE EXCUSE: &c. The design of this Parable is to represent the manner of Gods dealing with the people of the Jews, upon their rejecting the Faith of Christ and refu-

sing to embrace the Gospel. The Apostles of Christ, who were the Servants of God, were sent and commanded, in the first place, to Preach the glad tidings of the Gospel to them; and to invite them to come, and partake of that Blessing and Happiness, which was offered them by God, through Faith in, and Obedience unto, his Son Christ *Jesus*. But they, generally, having their hearts, wholly in a manner addicted to the Love of this World; had no inclination to receive so pure and Spiritual an Institution; and did not only themselves reject, but also persecuted others for embracing, the Christian Profession; despising and *treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the Blood of the Covenant*, wherewith they should have been *Sanctified, an unholy thing*; *and* even *doing despight unto the Spirit of Grace*, which would have wrought upon their hearts in order to their Conversion. As therefore the Man in this Parable, who made the Supper, was offended with those who did not come when they were Invited; and therefore wholly Excluded them from his Table; and sent his Servant to call others in their room (as you may find it in the latter part of it:

it:) So did Almighty God cast off the People of the Jews, upon their obstinate rejecting of *Jesus* Christ; giving them up to be destroyed and scattered by the power of the Romans; And commanded the Apostles to go out into all parts of the World, to gather a Church, and a peculiar People, unto him from among the Gentiles. But my present aim in Reflecting upon this Parable, lies clear Another way; namely, to represent, and reprove, those *Excuses* and *Pretences*, which so many men do make, for their gross neglect of the *Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ* notwithstanding that God, by the Mouth of his Ministers, does so frequently call, and earnestly invite them thereunto. And indeed this matter is, in so lively a manner, represented in the whole design of it that I think it is scarce possible to draw a more exact Parallel.

For here, In the first place, we have Almighty God making a Supper for us; for the feeding and nourishing of our Souls, in Vertue and Piety, through the Passion, and Death, of our Saviour Christ *Jesus*, which he has appointed for ever to be commemorated by our

Eating of this Bread and Drinking of this Cup, in Remembrance of him. To this Supper we are, not once only, but, often, bidden; by the frequent Admonitions and Exhortations of God's Ministers addressed unto us, that we should come and be partakers of this Holy Communion: And as the Guests who were invited in this Parable had framed some weak, and impertinent excuses, for their not coming; One had *bought a piece of Ground*, another *five Yoke of Oxen*, and a third had *Married a Wife*; none of which things needed to have hindered them from accepting of the good man's kindness. Just so we, when from Month to Month, and from Year to Year, we continually turn our backs upon God's Holy Table; have yet some sort of pretences wherewith we endeavour to satisfie our Consciences, and to excuse this gross and scandalous neglect of which we are Guilty.

That our Saviour Christ *Jesus* died for our Sins; that it is only for the sake of his Merits and Sufferings, that we can hope for Pardon and Eternal Life at the hand of God; That, before his Death, he left this command with all that should be called by his Name, that they

they ſhould *Eat of this Bread, and Drink of this Cup, in remembrance of him*; whereby we are obliged to ſhew forth his Death untill his ſecond coming: And laſtly, that this ordinance is the *Communion* of the *Body* and *Blood of Chriſt*; or, in other terms, the means whereby we do Communicate in the Benefits of that Sacrifice, which Chriſt offered, and in the merits of that Death and Paſſion, which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the ſheding of his *Blood* for us; and, conſequently, that the Receiving hereof, if duly performed, is not only our duty but alſo a great advantage and benefit unto us; All theſe things, I ſay, are ſo univerſally owned by all who profeſs Chriſtianity, that I need not offer any thing for the proof of them, or any part of them. But then ſurely one would think that when men, who are thus perſwaded, do ſo often, and for ſo long a time, abſent themſelves from this ordinance, there muſt be ſome inſuperable difficulties, and obſtacles in their way, which it is beyond their ſtrength or power to remove; or elſe that they would never, at the ſame time, both neglect their Duty, and forego their Intereſt. And yet I doubt not but to make

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it appear, as plainly as any thing can be, that there is nothing which we can, at any time, pretend as a hinderance of our coming to the Holy Communion; but what either is really, or ought to be, no hinderance at all; or else is such as it is in our power, by that grace and assistance which God never denies to those who seek it, wholly to remove and put out of the way.

To come to the matter then, and that I may proceed in an orderly method; I shall reduce all the impediments, which men do ever alledge for their not coming unto the holy Communion, to these Five heads: that is to say, either, *First*, that they are Sinners, and therefore dare not come; or *Secondly*, that they are so continually engaged, and taken up with Business, that they have not time to prepare themselves for it; or, *Thirdly*, that when they do endeavour to prepare themselves, they find they cannot do it as it ought to be done; or, *Fourthly*, that having formerly received the Communion, they find themselves never the better for it, and therefore think it to no purpose to come again; or, *Lastly*, that they are not well satisfied with the manner of Celebrating

ting, Administring, and Receiving this Ordinance in our Church, and therefore cannot joyn with our Congregations in it: Nor is there, I think, any thing that can be urged by way of Excuse for not coming to the Holy Communion, but what I shall fairly examine, and I hope effectually confute, under some one or other of these Particulars.

1. Then, some Men may say, that they are great Sinners, and therefore, upon that account, dare not come to the Holy Communion, for fear least they should be unworthy Receivers, and so, instead of obtaining any Benefit thereby, should only *Eat and Drink their own Damnation.*

To this I answer, that if a Man lies under the guilt of any Sin, and does not repent of it, and Heartily resolve to forsake and amend it; it is indeed a Presumption and a Sin for such a Person, whilest he continues in that state, to come to the Communion. But then I must tell him also, that not only his coming to the Holy Communion, but even his very *Prayers* are an *Abomination* to God *Prov.* 28. 9. For what is it else but a perfect Affront, and even a Mocking of the

the Divine Majesty, for a man to make a shew of Worship and Honour to him, whilest, at the same time, he goes on in willful disobedience to his known commands? Which I wish were well and seriously considered by those men, who make no scruple of addressing themselves to God in Prayer, whilest, by reason of their sins, of which they have not repented, they dare not approach unto his Holy Table.

But whatever sins a Man has been Guilty of in times past, if he truly repents of them, and Heartily forsakes them for the time to come; God has, so often and so plainly, promised in this case to grant a full and free Pardon of them, that they cannot justly be pretended as any obstacle, which should hinder us from approaching to him in any of his Ordinances.

Since then it is in the Power of every Man (at least of every one who by a long course of Wickedness has not provoked God wholly to withdraw his Grace from him) by that Grace and Assistance, which God continually offers unto us, to repent of his sins, and amend his Life: If such a Man looks upon his sins as a Bar between him and the Holy Communion;

munion; yet it is plainly such a Bar as is in his Power to remove, and therefore can never justly be pleaded as an excuse in his behalf.

But some man perhaps may say, that tho' he should beg God's pardon for his sins past, and sincerely resolve to forsake them; yet he fears, that, being frail, he may some time or other be prevailed on, by his own weakness or the strength of a Temptation, to break those resolutions which he has made, and return again to his sins. And if this should ever be the case with him, he doubts whether God would ever again admit him to Pardon and Reconciliation. And therefore he thinks it safer to abstain from the Holy Communion, rather then to run the hazard of being for ever excluded from the hopes of Heaven.

In answer to this I shall offer these three things.

First, Altho' a Man does plainly foresee, that hereafter he shall be most likely sometimes to fall into some Sins of frailty and infirmity, (such as a hasty Word or a suddain and unadvised Action) yet this ought not to hinder him from coming to the Holy Communion: For as St. *James* tells us, that, *In many things we offend*

offend all, Ja. 3. 2. So is there not any man upon the face of the Earth, who can be absolutely sure that he shall alwaies hereafter keep himself free from all manner of sin whatsoever. On the contrary as there is no man but what has his share, more or less, of human infirmities, so is it most reasonable to conclude, that, in the course of his Life, these will sometimes unavoidably surprise and betray him into some Sins. Against these our Infirmities therefore we must continually strive: And we may reasonably hope, that, by God's grace, and our own diligent and careful Endeavours, we may every day more and more prevail against them: But if this were a good Reason for abstaining from the Holy Communion, because a Man cannot, at once, get a full and perfect Victory over them; I cannot see how, even the best of men, (who cannot pretend to absolute perfection) could safely venture to partake of it: And consequently, this would be the way wholly to lay aside, and abolish the very Ordinance it self.

Secondly, but as for willful and deliberate Sins, or returning again unto an habitual course of wickedness; there is no man but, by the grace of God, and his

his own endeavours, may, if he pleaſe, for ever ſecure himſelf againſt it. For however God may think it fit, for our greater humility and a farther tryal of us, to leave us ſtill expoſed to ſome of the common infirmities of our Nature; yet, in reſpect of all habitual or deliberate Sins, we may aſſure our ſelves that *he is faithfull*, and *will not ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that we may* (if it be not our own fault) *be able to bear it*, 1 *Cor.* 10. 13. Nor will he fail to *draw nigh unto us*, whil'ſt we continue carefull to *draw nigh unto him. Jam.* 4. 8. Let us then but ſtedfaſtly reſolve, that we will be hearty, and induſtrious, in doing what lies in our own power; and we need not be diſcouraged by any ſuch fears as theſe, as long as we are ſecure that God will never let us want his aſſiſtance.

But Thirdly, let us put the caſe as bad as may be; that, after a ſerious Repentance, and moſt ſtedfaſt Reſolutions of Amendment, ratified and confirmed by the reception of the Holy Communion; a Man ſhould be ſo far prevailed upon by the temptations of the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, as to return again to his former wickedneſs, in as high or a higher degree than before; Yet even

in this case we cannot conclude that such a person is forever excluded by God from all possibility of pardon and reconciliation. There are indeed some passages of Scripture, that do represent the condition of such an one, to be very dreadful and dangerous: As *Heb.* 6. 4. 5. 6. and Chap. 10. 26. 27. 2. *Pet.* 2. 20. 21. But if, on the other side, we consider how often, and how highly, the Mercy of God is set forth and magnified, even towards the greatest Sinners, upon their true Repentance, that *he has no pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his way and Live.* Ezek. 33. 11. that *he is long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* 2. Pet. 3. 9. that *tho' our Sins be as Scarlet, or as Red as Crimson*, yet God is most ready, upon our Repentance, to make them *as white as Wooll or Snow.* Isai. 1. 18. From these and many such passages of Scripture I think we may well gather, that if the most Profligate and Relapsed Sinner, does, even after a long time, come at last to such a sense of his own Condition as throughly to *turn from the Wickedness that he hath committed*, and to Live the remainder of his days in the practice of Virtue and good Works, *doing that which is Lawful and right*, and notwithstanding all his

his failures, yet at last continues and Perseveres therein, that even such a Person as this *shall Save his Soul alive.* Ezek. 18. 27. Altho', at the same time, it stands with a great deal of Reason, that the greater a Man's Sins have been, and the oftner he has relapsed into them, the deeper his Sorrow, and the more laborious his Repentance must be, in order to obtain his Pardon. But since a possibility of Pardon there is, even in this case it self; we must not make the contrary fear a pretence for keeping our selves back from any of the Ordinances of God, and from a more immediate and intimate Communion with him.

And thus much for the first Impediment.

But Secondly some men pretend that they are so continually engaged, and taken up with Business, that they have not time to Prepare themselves for the Holy Communion, and therefore do not come to it.

To such men as these I answer, that this Business, which they pretend, is either Lawful business or Unlawful: If it be Unlawful Business, and such as cannot be followed with a good Conscience, it must be renounced and wholly laid aside. And to plead this as a Reason for not

coming to the Holy Communion, is altogether to aggravate, instead of excusing, our neglect. But if the business be it self Lawful, and followed in a Lawful way; if it neither contains, nor engages us in, any thing, which is dishoneſt, or any way contrary to the Law of God; such Buſineſs as this is ſo far from unqualifying a Man, that really it rather renders him the more fit to Receive the Holy Communion. For as Idleneſs is it ſelf a Sin, and the Mother, or at leaſt the Nurſe, of all manner of Wickedneſs; ſo Honeſt and Lawful buſineſs is a Duty which every man is obliged to be diligent in; 1. *Theſſ.* 4. 11. *Eph.* 4. 28. And certainly the performance of a Man's duty will never render him the leſs Acceptable to God, or unfit to draw near unto him in this or any other of his Ordinances.

But there is one particular ſort of Buſineſs, in which ſome men think that whil'ſt they are engaged, they cannot be well prepared for the Holy Communion; and that is a Law Suit. But to this the very ſame Anſwer muſt be given that is already returned to the pretence of Buſineſs in general. If a man engages in a Suit of Law, with a deſign to wrong, or defraud, another; If in the ma-

management of it he has recourſe to any baſe and Wicked arts or contrivances; If, not contented fairly to try the Merit of the cauſe, he ſtrives, by all ways, to caſt Perſonal Reflections upon his Adverſary; or, in a word, if herein he proceeds in ſuch a way as is contrary either to Juſtice or Charity; ſuch a Law Suit as this, I confeſs, renders a man altogether unfit to approach unto God in any way whatſoever; not only whil'ſt he is engaged in it, but alſo until he has made Reſtitution, and Satisfaction, to the beſt of his Power, for all the Wrong which he has thereby done to his Neighbour. But then why will any Man who pretends to Chriſtianity, engage in ſuch a matter as this; which is contrary to common Honeſty and a good Conſcience? Or if Unadviſedly he has engaged himſelf, before he knew what he did; Why does he not withdraw, and forbear to Proſecute an unjuſt cauſe, or a juſt one in an unjuſt way? Why does he not make Satisfaction to his Neighbour, if he has done him any Wrong? And how can he think to plead that as an excuſe for not coming to Gods Holy Table, which it is in his Power to lay aſide and to Remedy whenever he pleaſes?

But on the other side, if he designs no more but Fairly to make use of the Law of the Land, and the Power of the Magistrate (who is ordained of God) either to Defend, or Recover, what in Conscience he is verily perswaded is his just and Lawful right; if in the management of his Business he proceeds Honestly, and without any Fraud or Juggle; And lastly if he bears no Malice, nor offers any way to vent his Spleen against the Person of his Adversary, but is always free and ready to do him any reasonable Office of Kindness or Friendship, In such a Law suit as this there is nothing which is contrary to the Duty of a Christian, nor consequently any thing which needs be, in the least, a Hinderance to his coming to the Holy Communion.

But some perhaps will say that altho' there is nothing Sinful or Unlawful either in the Business they are about, or in their way of managing or following it; yet their time is so wholly taken up thereby, that they have not leisure for the Performance of those solemn, and Particular Devotions, which are necessary in order to their due Preparation. Nay such may be the condition of some, that they have not, it may be, so much as a place of retirement for

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their private Devotions (which may be the case of many Servants, and private Soldiers, and such like) and how can they prepare themselves as they ought, or how shall they venture to come if they are not so prepared.

To this I answer, that it is a mistake, which some well meaning Men have entertained, that they think they must not venture to Receive the Holy Communion except they say so many Prayers, and spend so many hours in Retirement and Meditation, for some days immediatly before the Celebration of it. Where a man indeed is at his own Command, and Master of his own time; he is much to be approved of and commended, if, upon such an Occasion as this, he spends more hours, than at other times, in private Prayer Reading and Meditation; that he may *trim his Lamp* before he goes *to meet the Bridegroom*; and cleanse and Adorn his *Wedding garment*, before he comes to the Marriage Feast. But where the Publick service of a Man's Country, or the Private necessities of himself or his Family, do engage him in so much Business as that he has not such leisure for Retirement; If in the mid'st of his Affairs, he ever takes care to have God in his thoughts, and often to lift

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up his Heart to him by private Ejaculations; and when he has neither Chamber nor Closet, Garden nor Field, to withdraw himself into, if he but seriously retires into his own thoughts (which a Man may do in any place; upon his Bed at midnight, and even in the midst of the greatest Croud in the day time) and there enquires into his Past Sins, and renews his Resolutions of Amendment; and if all this proceeds from an *honest and well meaning Heart*, truly and affectionately disposed, to the service of God, and the practice of Piety; no doubt but it shall be as well accepted by God, as the more solemn Devotions of those, who have better opportunity for such performances.

And thus much for the Second Impediment.

Thirdly, Some pretend that when they do endeavour to prepare themselves for the Holy Communion, they find they cannot do it as it ought to be done, and therefore they do not come: To the several Scruples of which sort of Men I shall return brief and distinct Answers.

Some then do apprehend, that they are not fit to come, because they are Ignorant, and not well grounded and instructed

ſtructed in the Principles of Religion.

To this I Anſwer, that, indeed, if a Man be Ignorant of thoſe things which are ordinarily neceſſary to the Salvation of every Chriſtian; it is, evidently not fit that he ſhould come to the Holy Communion, until ſuch time as he be better Inſtructed. But ſuch Inſtruction as this is ſo eaſy to be had (at leaſt amongſt us) that it muſt be every Man's own fault if he wants it. For how eaſy is it for every Man, who either reads the Scripture, or hears it read and Expounded in our Congregations, ſufficiently to learn all the great and neceſſary things of Chriſtian Religion; As for Example, that God Created all things; that *Jeſus* Chriſt is the Son of God, that he came into the World and took our Nature upon him, to Suffer for our Redemption; that, after he had Suffered, he roſe again from the Dead, and Aſcended into Heaven, where he remains for ever in the Glory and Majeſty of God, making Eternal Interceſſion for us; and that he ſhall come again at the end of the World to Judge both the living and the dead; (who ſhall at that time be raiſed again) and to ſentence every man either to Everlaſting Happineſs or Eternal Miſe-

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ry: That every Christian is to be admitted into the Church by Baptism; that it is his Duty to live Soberly, Righteously, and Godly, in this present World; and that it is by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, who is the giver of Spiritual life unto us, that we are alone enabled to perform these Duties. And Lastly, that, in remembrance of the Death and Passion of our Saviour *Jesus* Christ, we are Commanded to Eat of that Bread, and Drink of that Cup, which he has appointed; and which is the Communion of his Body and Blood, that is to say, the means whereby we do Communicate in the benefits of the Sacrifice which he offered, and in the merits of his Passion, which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the sheding of his *Blood* for our sakes, as I have already said. All this, I say, is so easy to be learnt and understood, that it is a great shame for any one who Lives in a Christian Country to be Ignorant of any part of it. And he who is thus far Instructed in his Religion; and endeavours, according to his ability, to encrease his knowledge of Divine things; and hereunto adds the Honest and Sincere Practice of what he understands; needs never fear that God will reject him for want of more knowledge. For

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altho' we must, according to our Capacity, *add to our Vertue, Knowledge*; yet it is not abundance of Knowledge, but much Honesty, Charity, and true Piety, that renders us acceptable and Pleasing to God, see 1. *Cor.* 1. 19. to the *7th* verse of the 2*d.* Chapter.

Again some do find their Faith to be weak and wavering; and perplexed with doubts, and Scruples, in matters of Religion; and therefore are afraid to come.

To this I answer, that indeed the stronger and Firmer, a Mans Faith is, so much the better; and we ought to endeavour, as much as in us lies, that our Faith may ever be built upon sure and solid Principles, as well for our own comfort & satisfaction, as that we may be the better able, upon occasion, to *give an Answer to every one who shall ask us a Reason of the hope that is in us* 1. Pet. 3. 15. But when a Man has done what he can to strengthen and Confirm his Faith, if it still continues Infirm and weak; yet if he be Honest and Pious, in his Life and Practice; he is never the less acceptable to God for the weakness of his Faith. For strength of Faith is not a thing in our own Power; and therefore not so much a Duty in us, as a Reward which God is pleased to bestow, in such a measure as he thinks fit,

fit, upon those who are sincere and diligent in his Service: And *he that is weak in the Faith*, may yet be a very good Christian, and fit to be *Received* into the Church of Christ; altho' he be not qualified for *doubtful Disputations* Ro. 14. 1. As long as a Tree continues to bring forth plenty of Fruit, we are sure it is alive, nor do we presently cut it down and cast it into the Fire, because it is not altogether so well fixed at the root, and therefore, it may be subject to be shaken by the violence of the Wind: And the weakest Faith, if it produces abundance of good Works, shall be accepted by God; when the strongest Faith, if barren and unfruitful, shall be rejected and set at nought by him. See *Jam.* 2. 14. *&c.* Whenever therefore an honest and well disposed Man finds his Faith to be any way weak and wavering, let him take up the good Man's speech in the Gospel *Lord I beleive help thou mine unbelief*, *Mar.* 9. 24. And let him never fear but that God who is infinitely gracious and merciful will accept of him.

Some, again are afraid that they do not love God as well as they ought; and the reason of this fear is, because they do not find in themselves such warm and affectionate motions of their mind towards him,

as they apprehend to be suitable to his infinite excellency and goodness: And for this Reason they dare not venture to come.

To this I answer that, indeed, the more ardent and Affectionate our love to God is, so much the better is that, as well as our Faith, for being strong and unshaken. But as our Faith is to be judged of by its fruitfulness rather than its Firmness (as I have just now shewn) so the Holy Scripture teaches us That *the Love of God* consists altogether in *Keeping his Commandments* 1. Joh. 5. 3. Some people are Naturally of such a temper as more easily to be moved with a Passionate affection towards those they Love then others are: And yet others, who do not find such warm Motions within themselves, may be as ready and willing as they, to do acts of Kindness where they profess a Friendship. Nor is the Love of the later sort ever the less to be Valued, because it appears to be Seated and fixed more in the Judgment and will, which are Subject to less alteration, than the Affections: As the true Love of a Wife to her Husband, is to be measured by her readiness to obey and please him in all things, much rather then by the fondness which she expresses to his Person. If therefore a Man finds himself stedfastly re-

solved, *with full purpose of Heart, to cleave unto God*, and upon all Occasions to do what he Commands; ever preferring the pleasing of him before any, or all, the Honours, Profits, or Pleasures, of this World; he may assure himself that he is a real and true Lover of God; nor need he absent himself from the Holy Communion, for want of that Ardency and Liveliness of affection to God, which the very best of Men perhaps do oftener wish for than enjoy, or find within themselves.

Others there are who Fear they are not in perfect Charity with all the World. They have sometimes had to do with Men of Base and Unjust dealings, who have broken their promises, and, it may be, their Oaths; and thereby betray'd them who have depended on them; or have otherwise been Guilty of wicked and unworthy Practices. And altho', in Obedience to God's commands, they would not do any thing by way of Revenge, even against these very Men; yet as often as they see them, or do but think of them, they find their very Blood to rise against them, and cannot possibly Suppress that Anger, and Indignation, which springs up in their Minds against such persons; and therefore they Fear that their Charity is Defective, and so dare not come to the Holy Communion.

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To this I answer that our Charity towards Man, as well as our Love to God, is to be Measured by the purposes and Resolutions of our will, and our Actions consequent thereto; and not by the suddain Motions of our Passions and Affections: Which in the Case above mentioned, may be scarcely so much in our Power, as wholly to be Conquered and stifled by us. But whatever Passionate resentments may force themselves into our minds, upon such occasions as these; If we do not suffer them to break out into Bitter and Reproachful expressions, or Malicious and Revengeful Actions: And if in Spite of our Anger we do firmly resolve, in Obedience to God's command, to return Good, and not Evil, for Evil: In a word if, as St. *Paul* directs us, when we are *Angry*, we take care and watch over our selves that we *Sin not*, Eph. 4. 26. (which is certainly in our Power through the Grace of God & our own Endeavours;) we need not fear that any such inward motions of our Passions, as we cannot wholly suppress, but yet do not suffer to break out into any Sinful words or Actions; shall ever be imputed to us as a Breach of Charity.

Others again are afraid that they are not sorrowful enough for the Sins which they have Commited, because they do not find their

their Grief so quick and pungent as they think it ought to be; nor strong enough even so much as to bring a Tear from their Eyes; and therefore they dare not venture to come.

To this I answer that true it is, indeed, that we can never grieve too much for our Sins, whereby we have offended our good and gracious God: And if even *Rivers of tears* could run down our Eyes, on this occasion, they would all be but little enough. But yet, after all; our sorrow for sin, is not to be measured by the Passionateness of it, which is soon over; or the tears it produces, which are as soon dried up; but is altogether to be estimated by the Amendment which it causes in our Lives. It is a never failing rule which St. *Paul* gives us to know *Godly Sorrow* by, which is, that it *worketh Repentance*, 1 *Cor.* 7. 10. If then a Man has so true and serious a sense of his Sins, as that it brings him to Repentance, that is to say, to a thorough and lasting Reformation of his life; this Sorrow, tho' it never affects him in a Passionate way, or draws any Tears at all from his Eyes; yet is certainly true godly Sorrow, and such as shall be accepted by God; because it worketh Repentance, which is the only End for which godly Sorrow is either required or valued.

Others

Others yet again there are who complain, that when they would fit themselves to prepare for the Holy Communion, they in a little time grow so tired with the length of those Devotions which are thereunto required, that they are not able to accomplish what they propos'd. And when they would even *force* themselves to continue their Prayers and Meditations; they cannot, with all their care, keep their Minds fixed, and attentive, upon what they are about; but their thoughts, will unavoidably wander upon other things that are Idle and Impertinent. And this they apprehend to be the Sin of *drawing near to God with their Mouths, and Honouring him with their Lips, when their Heart is far from him*, Isai. 29. 13. And therefore They dare not come unto his Holy Table.

To this I answer, that whenever we address our selves unto God in Prayer, we ought certainly to use our utmost endeavour so to fix and compose our Minds, as that our thoughts may not wander and go astray, if we can Possibly hinder them.

And he who pretends to Pray with his Lips, and does not withall strive that his Heart and mind may be Devoutly affected, is undoubtedly Guilty of a great slight put upon the Majesty of God; & may justly be taxed with some part of that Sin which

I but just now made Mention of. But when a Man has done the best he can to fix his thoughts, and to keep his mind from wandring in Prayer; If after all this, idle and Impertinent Imaginations, do, against his will, crowd themselves upon him; and like Flies, tho' continually beaten off, yet still Return again and molest him; In this case he may well Assure himself that God who is Gracious and Merciful, will never impute that to him as a Sin, which, with all his endeavours, he cannot help: But it shall only be Reckoned upon the score of his Infirmities, against which indeed he must ever strive; but it may be shall never be able wholly to Conquer them as long as he Lives.

But there is one piece of advice which I think very proper to offer unto those that are in these circumstances; which is, that they should comprise their private devotions in as few words as conveniently they can; and then they will neither be so apt to be tired, nor their thoughts to wander therein, as when they are drawn out to a greater length. It is not *much Speaking* that makes our Prayers the more acceptable to God, or the sooner heard by him, *Mat.* 6. 7. And it is easy to comprehend all, that is ordinarily necessary to be said in Prayer, in a few words. The Lord's Prayer is but short; and yet very full;

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and certainly a form most acceptable to God. The Publicans *God be merciful to me a Sinner*, Luk. 18. 13. was as well received, coming from a sincere and honest heart, as if he had made his confession in more words. And there is no manner of doubt but that short and devout Ejaculations, frequently offered up to God, by a truly pious Soul, shall effectually prevail at the throne of Grace, when they come from such a Person, as by Reason of his natural frailty and infirmity, is not so well able to make longer prayers.

Again some there are who are given to mirth and company keeping; and know not how well to become serious, and reserved enough, to be fit for the Holy Communion, and therefore they do not come.

I answer, that a Chearful and Pleasant Disposition is so far from being unlawful, or any way displeasing to God; that, on the contrary, where it is rightly managed, and kept within due bounds, it is commonly very serviceable to the promoting of peace and love in the world, which is one of the great ends of Christian Religion. Let then a man but take *strict* care, that his mirth be not sinful in it's self, nor instrumental to promote wickedness in the world: Let him not droll upon Religion and piety, nor *make a mock at Sin*: Let no jest that is bitter or sarcastical, or tends to

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the discredit or undervaluing of his Neighbour, or which is any way profane, filthy, or obscene, come forth of his Lips; nor let him shew any manner of delight or satisfaction when such things are vented by others: Let him abstain from all debauched Songs or Stories, which seem to be contrived on purpose to corrupt the World: And let him never promote, but alwaies, as much as he can, discountenance all manner of Rioting, Drunkness, Lewdness and Profaness: In a word, let him be sure that his mirth betrays neither himself, nor others, to any thing which is contrary to piety, charity or Sobriety; And as long as he keeps himself within such bounds as these (which is plainly very possible to every Man who will heartily resolve it) he needs not fear that a chearful, and facetious behaviour, will render him ever the the worse a Christian, or the less fit to receive the Holy Communion.

And last of all (that I may conclude what I have to say under this Head) some there are who, having met with many crosses and afflictions in the World, have their minds so discomposed and their thoughts distracted with care, grief, or trouble, that they cannot settle their minds, as they think they ought, for the Holy Communion; and therefore they do not come to it. To

To this I answer, that if any trouble or affliction provokes a Man to Impatience, and prevails so far as to make him murmur and repine against the providence of God; this, indeed, is a Sin, and must, and may, as all other Sins, be repented of, as I have already said under the first Head of this Discourse. But if there be no more in it then this, that the crosses and vexations under which a Man lies, do so discompose his Mind, as that he can not keep his thoughts from wandering when he is at his Devotion; to this case I have but just now spoken, and need not repeat what I have said upon it.

And thus I have at last done with the Third impediment; upon which I have been forced the longer to dwell, because of the many scruples, and objections, which it affords.

I shall need to speak but a word or two, to the Fourth impediment, which some Men pretend; namely that, having formerly received the Holy Communion, they find themselves never the better for it; and therefore think it to no purpose to come again.

To which I answer that if a Man reaps no Benefit by the reception of the Holy Communion, the fault is altogether his own; because either he does not duly prepare himself for it, or else does not receive it so often as he should. Some bodies are so distempered, and stomachs vitiated, that they turn the best Food into corrupt and evil Nourishment: And if a Man of the most healthy Constitution should

ſhould eat but one Meal in a Week, it would never keep him in health and ſtrength. But let the Stomach be cleanſed, and the Body brought into good order; and then let the Man eat his conſtant and daily meals; and he ſhall find both his health and ſtrength encreaſe upon him. And the Caſe is juſt the ſame with this Spiritual Food, which is exhibited to us in the Holy Sacrament. Whil'ſt the Soul is polluted and diſtempered with Sins unrepented of, it will certainly rather do us hurt than good to receive it: And when Men partake of it but once in a year or two, or, it may be, not ſo often; whatever ſtrength or refreſhment their Souls begin to find thereby, is loſt and forgot before it comes again to be renewed by the ſame ordinance. But let a Man throughly cleanſe and purge his Soul from Sin by a ſincere repentance; and with an honeſt heart, and mind well prepared, let him come as often as he can to God's Holy Table; and by the frequent and conſtant uſe of this Holy Sacrament, he need not doubt but he ſhall find himſelf continually to grow more and more in Grace; becoming ſtill better and better enabled to reſiſt all temptations, and daily finding more and more quiet and comfort, in his mind and conſcience.

And thus much for the Fourth impediment.

I come now, in the Laſt place, of all to ſpeak a word or two to thoſe who are not well Satisfied with the manner of celebrating the Holy Communion in our Church, and therefore will not join with our congregations in it.

Two things there are, which they chiefly object againſt us in this caſe: One that we make

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uſe of ſuch Ceremonies as they cannot comply with; and in particular, that the holy Communion is amongſt us to be received in the poſture of Kneeling: And the other is that we adminiſter it to a mixt congregation, without a ſtrict enquiry into the qualifications of all thoſe who are admitted to it.

To the firſt of theſe I anſwer that no man can ſay that either Kneeling at the Holy Communion, or any other of the Rites or Ceremonies which we uſe at the celebration of it, are Sinful or unlawful; becauſe it does not appear that God has any where *Forbid* them. The utmoſt then that they can pretend, is only that they are improper, and inconvenient. Now, beſides that others, who may be as good Judges, are of a different opinion; I would deſire to know whether ſuch things as are not Sinful, but only improper and inconvenient, can be a ſufficient warrant to any Man to ſeperate himſelf from the Communion of an Orthodox, Eſtabliſhed Church? If not, then they have no juſt reaſon upon this account to ſeparate from us. But if they be, then I would farther demand, which is the greateſt inconveniency, to kneel at the Communion, or to make a Schiſm in the Church? And of the two inconveniences whether we ought not alwaies to make choice of the leaſt?

To the other objection I anſwer, that where any Man openly appears to be wicked and ſcandalous in his Life and converſation; By the Diſcipline of our Church, we are required to exclude ſuch a Perſon from the Holy Communion, untill he gives good evidence of his repentance and reformation. But where nothing outwardly

appears

appears against a Man, who lives in the profession of the true Religion; what have we to do to enquire into the secrets of his Heart, for which he is accountable only to God? And if our Saviour Christ did not exclude even Judas himself from the Holy Communion, because at that time, he had done nothing openly; although Christ well knew that he had made a private agreement with the cheif Priests to betray him. Why should we take upon us to be more strict in this matter? Or who has given us any Authority so to be?

And thus have I Examined, and I hope sufficiently Answered all the Pretences which Men do ordinarily make for neglecting the Holy Communion. I have but this one thing to add, and I have done; namely, that as it is a great Sin to receive the Holy Communion unworthily, that is to say without true Repentance; so certainly is it no less a Sin, to slight and neglect that Ordinance, which Christ himself has expressly appointed and commanded, in remembrance of that Death and Passion which he underwent for us. Let us therefore take the matter into our serious consideration; and whilest we are so very cautious to avoid the danger on the one hand, let us not be so foolish as to run our selves into as great a hazard on the other. For as he who presumed to come to the Nuptial Feast without a *Wedding Garment*, was severely punished for his Presumption, *Matt.* 22. 11, &c. so they who neglected to come at all, and slighted the invitation which was given them, were accounted as unworthy Persons, and received their doom accordingly: *v.* 7, 8.

FINIS.